

An additional subspecies of the Croaking Cisticola from the temperate uplands of southern Africa

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The Croaking Cisticola *Cisticola natalensis* (Smith), 1843, is the largest-sized member of the genus and has a wide continental range, occupying open grassland habitats and eschewing most wooded savanna types. It was initially made known to science on material of the southern terminal population occurring in Transkei and Natal collected by Dr Andrew Smith during the course of his political mission to Zululand in 1832. In his definitive revision of the genus *Cisticola*, Lynes (1930) accorded nominate *C. natalensis*, the type-locality of which is Durban, Natal, an extensive range, extending in the east well to the north of the Zambezi R. In a more recent assessment of the species' geographical variation, Traylor (1986), following Clancey (1969), restricts *C. n. natalensis* to regions lying well south of the Zambezi from the plateau of Zimbabwe and Mozambique south of the Save R. to the eastern Cape, Transkei, Natal, Swaziland and the eastern Transvaal. Still more recent study into the present cisticola's subspeciation levels reveals that four rather than three races should be recognised in the Southern African Subregion alone, one of which will require to be given a name.

The disrupted range of *C. natalensis* in the southern third of Africa, as demonstrated in Hall & Moreau's *Atlas* of 1970, shows the species in the south of its range distributed from sea level to 1525 m in the high interior, this translating into a mosaic of populations varying in the intensity of the dorsal streaking and ground colouration. Subspecifically relevant variation is well-shown in freshly moulted non-breeding dress material but to a reduced extent in the strikingly different breeding plumage, both plumages in turn being rapidly affected by both fading through exposure to the sun and grass abrasion. These changes need to be taken into account in subspeciation studies. It is now found that the nominate race is relatively reddish or ochreous tawny and finely streaked over the upper-parts in fresh non-breeding dress (late April–June) and is confined to the humid coastlands from about the Kei R. of the eastern Cape-Transkei border, north to the Lebombo Mtns and the Mozambique lowlands from Maputo Bay southwards. The birds breeding over the temperate eastern highlands of the Transvaal and much of the Zimbabwean plateau to the north of the Limpopo R. are paler and more heavily streaked in comparison, distinctly less reddish, and may now take the name

***Cisticola natalensis vigilax* subsp. nov.**

Type. ♂, adult. "The Downs", southwest of Tzaneen, Transvaal, at 24°08'S, 30°11'E, 1371 m a.s.l., 24 September 1974. Collected by

P. A. Clancey. In the collection of the Durban Natural Science Museum, D. M. Reg. No. 30017. Gonads noted as enlarging.

Description. Differs from *C. n. natalensis* in non-breeding dress (late April–June) in having the ground-colour of the upper surface much less reddish and more stone-coloured, the shaft-streaking broader and blacker, that over the hind-neck less suppressed. Over the entire dorsal surface the feathers are edged light Cinnamon-Buff or duller, *versus* deep Tawny-Olive in nominate *natalensis* (Ridgway 1912). Rump greyer with little or no tawny overlay, and edging to wing-coverts and remiges lighter and greyer. White below, with reduced buff on breast, sides and flanks. In the breeding dress (from October) not well-differentiated and about as uniform over the upper-parts, but ranging somewhat greyer and more scaled over the mantle. Similar in size.

Compared with *C. n. matengorum* Meise, which replaces it to the northeast, differs in the non-breeding dress in being lighter, less reddish, tawny (feathers in *matengorum* Buckthorn Brown) over the upper-parts, but equally heavily streaked. Buff over underside paler. In the breeding dress lighter and greyer above, the shaft-streaking in *matengorum* broader and brownish black, and with the hind-neck streaking finer and on a light buffish grey ground. In *matengorum* the hind-neck ground-colour and shaft-streaking is consistent with that of the crown, mantle and scapulars. Tail also with smaller black sub-apical spots and paler apices. Similar in size to *matengorum*.

Measurements. Non-br. dress: wings of 19 ♂♂ 69–75 (72.1), s.d. 1.57; tails of 10, 60–69 (64.5), s.d. 2.39. Wings of 4 ♀♀ 58–59.5 (58.6), tails 52.5–60 (54.7) mm.

Material examined. 26 (Transvaal: Komati R., Hector Spruit, Nelspruit, Barberton, Sabi Sands Nature Reserve, "The Downs", Groot Spelonk (south of Louis Trichardt); Swaziland: Ranches Ltd (Eranchi); Botswana: Gaborone; Zimbabwe: Matopos (Angelsea Farm), Umvuma, Mt Selinda, Beatrice. Two specimens from northern Zululand appear to be migrants: ♂ Candover, 6 September 1964, and ♂ near Melmoth, 1 July 1951). Also of *C. n. natalensis* 50, *C. n. matengorum* 14, and other taxa 10.

Range: The eastern highlands and adjacent escarpment and immediate lowlands of the Transvaal from about Amsterdam in the south, north to the Soutpansberg (to about 22°30'S (Kemp *et al.* 1985)), adjacent Swaziland, and recorded once in breeding dress from southeastern Botswana (29 July 1910). Re-appears north of the arid Limpopo R. valley over the plateau of Zimbabwe from Matabeleland in the southwest, north to Mashonaland, where meeting and intergrading with *C. n. matengorum* (Irwin 1981). The Candover and Melmoth records mentioned earlier, and mixed samples comprising both examples of *C. n. natalensis* and *C. n. vigilax* from northern Swaziland (Ranches Ltd) and lowland Transvaal, immediately to the north (at Hector Spruit), indicate a measure of cold dry season movement on the part of elements of *vigilax*, from the more exposed grasslands of the eastern Transvaal highlands.

Measurements of the type. Wing 73.5, culmen from base 18, tarsus 30.5, tail 56 (moult) mm. The specimen is in moderately worn dress,

but has been selected in order to place the type-locality of the subspecies on the summit grasslands of the eastern high country of Transvaal.

Etymology. *Vigilax* from Latin *vigilare* to be watchful=always on the alert.

Remarks. The established ranges of the four subspecies to be recognised from the Southern African Subregion are summarized hereunder:

- (a) *Cisticola natalensis natalensis* (Smith), 1843: Durban, Natal. From the Kei R., on the eastern Cape/Transkei border, to coastal and midland Natal, Zululand, the Lebombo Mtns and southern Mozambique to the Maputo Bay region.
- (b) *Cisticola natalensis vigilax* Clancey, 1994: "The Downs", eastern Transvaal, at 24°08'S, 30°11'E. Eastern Transvaal highlands and adjacent escarpment region to the plateau of Zimbabwe, as outlined above.
- (c) *Cisticola natalensis holubii* (Pelzeln), 1882: Pandamatenga, north-eastern Botswana. Locally distributed from northwestern Zimbabwe, adjacent northeastern Botswana and southwestern Zambia from the Machili R. at 17°07'S, 25°08'E to Kasusu and Kalomo (Benson *et al.* 1971); also eastern Caprivi Strip, Namibia. Replaced to the north by *C. n. katanga* Lynes, 1930.
- (d) *Cisticola natalensis matengorum* Meise, 1934: Nambunchu, Southern Province, Tanzania. Mozambique lowlands from about the Save R., eastern highlands of Zimbabwe from Chipinga northwards, eastern Zambia, Malawi, and southeastern Tanzania to the south of *C. n. littoralis* van Someren, 1943.

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